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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

SEPTEMBER 1st, 1863.

THE LONDON MUSICAL SEASON.

By HENRY C. LUNN.

Author of "Musings of a Musician."

THERE is hope for an Art when it ceases to be a Fashion. Exclusive patronage may warm it with smiles in its infancy, and nurse it in its arms ere it has strength to run alone; but as years increase its power, it struggles to be free, and no bonds can hold it from fulfilling its mission.

That Music has now escaped from its somewhat selfish nurses, there can be little doubt; yet, in spite of its strength, let us not forget that, though vigorous, it is still young.

In Painting and Sculpture we speak with reverence of men belonging to a bygone age who have erected monuments which still serve as landmarks for those who would follow in their footsteps; but the colossal works which have really made music what it is, have been all created in comparatively recent years. We have but just celebrated the centenary of the birth of Handel: men we meet every day have shaken hands with Beethoven: Mozart lived and played in the time of our fathers: Mendelssohn was but a few years ago amongst us all, in the active and earnest pursuit of his art: Spohr has but lately passed from us; and Rossini (who may be called the father of modern Italian music) still lives, and, even now, gives to the world undeniable proofs of the activity of his mind.

The youth of music itself then (as compared with the other arts), must be borne in mind when we consider the real progress it has made in England alone. We can remember the time (and that not many years ago) when a symphony (in its entire state) could scarcely be played to a mixed audience—when a sonata of Beethoven's was rarely heard out of the studio of a professor—and the overture to a "Midsummer Night's Dream" was hissed out of the orchestra at a public concert.

But although these times have passed away, and passed so rapidly that music has ceased almost to be a luxury, and grown to be a necessity, let us not be too sanguine in its progress to admit that there are many amongst our audiences who have yet to be educated to the just appreciation of the music they hear. It would be absurd to say that all who attend our classical concerts can understand, or derive enjoyment from, one half of the compositions performed; but the great point gained is that it is no longer considered clever to call them "slow." The enthusiast, therefore, who mentally feasts upon every note of a great work with the most intense gratification, is often supported by the man who

calmly and comfortably sleeps through it by his side; and so between those who wish to go, and those who ought to go, concert-rooms and opera-houses are filled, and good music marches onward into the land.

This active enjoyment of the majority, and passive endurance of the minority, shows most undeniably the progress that music has made amongst us. When once want of knowledge in the art ceases to be "gentlemanly," knowledge will be assumed as a passport into society; and thus we draw within a magic circle alike the educated and the ignorant.

A glance at the past Musical Season will at once confirm us in all these observations. Two Italian Opera-houses, the Philharmonic, New Philharmonic, the Musical Society, Monday Popular Concerts, Sacred Harmonic Society, assembling full audiences at each performance, to hear the greatest orchestral and vocal works; Classical Pianoforte Concerts, by our ablest professors, with a programme containing compositions, any one of which might have been prescribed as an opiate for our grandfathers; besides benefit concerts and minor performances, which, even to enumerate, would far exceed our limits.

To commence with the opera. The season may be said to have been highly successful for both houses; but we cannot help feeling that the triumph achieved by M. Gounod's "Faust," was, to some extent, due to the weariness of the subscribers caused by the *toujours perdrix* system which prevails year after year, in spite of protest. The same food must pall, after a time, upon the appetite of the least fastidious, whatever may be the novel sauce with which it is served up.

"Norma," "La Sonnambula," "Il Trovatore," and other works of which operatic audiences know every note, cannot be accepted night after night because a new singer imported from the continent is to be tested in the principal character. A really good work, ably executed in every department, is what the public has a right to expect at a first-class lyrical establishment; and the series of failures during the last season must force us to the conclusion that there must be a great want of judgment in those who make such engagements.

With such artists as Madlle. Titiens, Madlle. Trebelli, Giuglini, Santley, and Gassier, at Her Majesty's Theatre; and Madlle. Adelina Patti, Mario, Tamberlik, and Faure, at Covent-garden, it was felt scarcely necessary that so large a portion of the season should have been consumed in experimental first appearances; and M. Gounod, with his "Faust," therefore, stepped in at the very moment when the public was most ready to accept him.

It may be, perhaps, testing the composer of "Faust" by too high a standard, to say that his opera is scarcely conceived in the spirit of Goethe; to a certain extent a composer is the

slave of his *libretto*, and that the "Faust" submitted to M. Gounod is not the "Faust" of Göethe, it would be useless to deny. The music is intellectual throughout—soaring, indeed, in many parts, higher than we have latterly been accustomed to—but often disappointing us when our expectations have been most raised. The dramatic material is ever present; but the genius that holds these materials, and with them creates an enduring work, is wanting. It is not a poem, but it is poetical; it is not a drama, but it is dramatic. We are not of those who speak slightly of an opera, because you cannot "carry away the melodies." We know many small works where you can carry away much, and many large works where you can carry away little. Melody there is in "Faust," and that of a very high order; but it is of that fragmentary nature that does not seize upon the ear, and haunt you like a ghost through the night. "Faust" is a work that will bear study; you can take the score to your room, and every page will prove to you that a man of mark has arisen amongst us. The orchestral introduction, the scenes between Faust and Mephistopheles in the first act; the choral effects in the Fair scene; the exquisite colouring of the music between Faust and Marguerite in the garden, and the highly dramatic music before the cathedral (although perplexingly reminding us of Meyerbeer), are all conceived with the most refined appreciation of the situations. In the instrumentation, M. Gounod has shown himself a consummate master. Nothing can be more artistic than the manner in which he handles his orchestra throughout; and if we even object to the noise of his grand military chorus, we cannot but admit that the voices and instruments are admirably combined.

The execution of this opera at Her Majesty's Theatre, where it was first produced, was thoroughly satisfactory. Such a first night of an elaborate work, we scarcely recollect. The principal vocalists, chorus, and orchestra, seemed as much at home in the music, as if it had run for half the season. The *Margherita* of Madlle. Titiens was, in every respect, so thoroughly artistic a personation, that we almost forgot to enquire, where so much was present, how much was absent. That she was fully competent to grapple with the highly dramatic music of M. Gounod was evident in the first scene, and in the many impassioned situations with which the work abounds; but we could have desired in the tender breathings of the love scenes a gentleness inseparable in our mind from the ideal of Göethe's heroine. The *Faust* of Signor Giuglini displayed the voice and style of this admirable artist to the best advantage; and Signor Gassier, in *Mephistopheles*, laboured hard to give that colouring to the part with which we scarcely think the composer has invested it. Too much praise cannot be given to Mr. Santley, who gave the utmost importance to the small character of

Valentin; and Madlle. Trebelli, in the minor part of *Siebel*, materially added to the strength of the cast.

The improvement, since last season, in the orchestra and chorus, was particularly apparent in this opera; and Signor Arditi conducted like a thoroughly conscientious artist throughout.

The fatigue of sustaining the post of *prima donna* during such a season as the past one at Her Majesty's Theatre, would appear almost beyond the power of any single vocalist; but that Madlle. Titiens has not only done this, but has also added a short after-season (singing sometimes five nights a week), is a fact almost unexampled in operatic annals. So thoroughly trained an artist has rarely been tasked to such an extent with a result so satisfactory to all concerned.

The failure of Signor Schira's "Niccòlò de Lapi" need only be mentioned for the purpose of expressing our regret that the verdict pronounced by the public should not have been foreseen by the management.

The names of Signor Fricca and Signor Baragli merely occur to us as "names" which rapidly passed away; but Madlle. Artôt, who came somewhat late in the season, has thoroughly ingratiated herself with the audience, and we shall look forward with pleasure to her re-appearance next season.

The engagement of Mr. Sims Reeves, and the production of "Oberon," proved highly successful (especially for the "people's nights"); and, considering what Mr. Mapleson has done during the season, we must forgive him for what he has not done, in fulfilment of his opening address to his subscribers.

At the Royal Italian Opera, "Faust" of course claims our first attention; and although produced after the public voice had stamped it as a great success at the other house, the attraction proved that there was an audience for each. Nothing could be more perfect than the manner in which this opera was placed upon the stage. The orchestra so minutely realised the intention of the composer, that each performer seemed to have studied his part separately; and the scenery was a triumph of painting and stage arrangement.

Madame Miolan Carvalho (for whom the part of *Margherita* was originally written) was, in appearance, the pure and innocent peasant girl of Göethe; but, unfortunately, the very requirements of opera almost preclude the possibility of a due realisation of such a part as *Margherita*. The slight and delicate girl of Göethe requires the *physique* of a strong woman for Gounod; and either the drama or the music must, therefore, to a certain extent, be sacrificed. Something between the refined execution of Carvalho, and the vocal power of Titiens, would be the ideal of an operatic *Margherita*.

Signor Tamberlik (though not the Tamberlik of old) is yet an artist of the true school; and, although the part of *Faust* scarcely suited him, it

is doubtful whether a more adequate representative could have been found in the establishment. The part of *Mephistopheles* was finely sung and finely acted by M. Faure, who has firmly taken his place as one of the best artists on the operatic stage. The minor characters were admirably sustained, many well-known favourites undertaking to aid the general effect by accepting comparatively subordinate parts.

A brief recapitulation of the principal events of the season at this establishment, must strengthen the conviction we have already expressed, that many of the best nights have been wasted in first appearances, which cannot have been duly considered. We need only refer to Madlle. Demi in *Marta*, and Signor Caffieri in *Arnoldo*, in confirmation of our opinion.

That Madlle. Carlotta Patti should have made her *debüt* in England at the Royal Italian Opera, is, we think, somewhat questionable, feeling as we do that only operatic artists should be admissible. She sang like a bird on its perch, the liquid notes issuing from her throat as if for very joy; but as it was only in a concert that she could be heard, in consequence of her unfortunate lameness, it was felt impossible for her to retain a permanent place in an operatic establishment; and much as she won upon her audience, therefore, she soon ceased to appear.

Foremost amongst the new comers must rank Madlle. Lucca, who, although young, possesses all the requisites for a first-rate vocalist. Her performance of *Valentine* took the audience by surprise; and much regret was felt when she was compelled to return to Berlin. Madlle. Fioretti (who made her first appearance in "I Puritani") might have taken a high place in the estimation of the public, had she not most unaccountably disappeared, from motives we believe of professional jealousy, during the rehearsal of "Robert." Madlle. Frizzi (who made her *debüt* as *Norma*), and Madlle. Frizza, also added strength to the company during the season. Our old favourites, Mario, Ronconi, Faure, and Tamberlik, were again with us; and Signor Naudin proved himself an exceedingly useful tenor. In "Robert" M. Obin made his first appearance, and succeeded so completely that his sudden return to Paris created no small surprise.

Little new can be said of Madlle. Adelina Patti, who returned to us in "La Sonnambula" early in the season, and remained one of the chief attractions to the end. Her greatest success, in a part new to us, was *Maria* in "La figlia del reggimento," a character admirably suited both to her vocal and dramatic powers.

Of novelty in opera we have had but little. "La forza del destino" was in the prospectus at the beginning of the season; but we have now learned to estimate a prospectus at its true value. "L'étoile du Nord," "Stradella," "Fra Diavolo," and other works expected also according to promise, must pass over, we suppose, to a

year of famine. It has been a prosperous season for Mr. Gye, but we cannot help feeling that much of this prosperity is mainly owing to M. Gounod's attractive opera.

That two Opera-houses, open at the same time, should not only be highly successful, but that each should be able to give extra performances, without the aid of the subscription, and one still linger beyond the season with "cheap nights," is a fact too remarkable to be passed over in considering the state of music in London at the present time. But when we add that the audiences at all the concerts and other performances during the season have scarcely ever been so large, we are fully borne out in the observation with which we started, that music in England has ceased to be a mere fashion.

The Philharmonic, still holding its place, like an old aristocratic mansion in the midst of a modern busy street, maintains its high character, and leaves to others the task of instituting reforms, which seem naturally to belong to youth. The last remnant of the exclusive concert-room, the doors of which can only be opened with gold, it still enlists amongst its subscribers the names of many who cling to the notion that art, like game, should be kept in preserves.

The New Philharmonic has, however, now stepped in, and thoroughly proved that, as a commercial speculation, good music will pay to large audiences at small prices, as well as to small audiences at large prices; and the people, seeing that cheap art is not necessarily bad art, can now feast upon the same fare as the rich, at an outlay within their means. The programmes of the New Philharmonic Concerts will also convince us that not only do the people like good music, but they like the best. Beethoven's greatest symphonies, Spohr's "Power of Sound," Mendelssohn's two symphonies (we mean the "Scotch" and the "Italian," as they are called), the most classical violin concertos, and Beethoven and Mendelssohn's pianoforte concertos, are amongst the most attractive works they can announce. Experience, indeed, has proved that the concert-room will in future not only be a shrine for the worship of art, but that it will never be used as a confessional for ignorance.

Chamber music for the million was indeed a speculation which the most enthusiastic believer in musical progress might have been forgiven for considering doubtful; but the Monday Popular Concerts have triumphantly dispelled these doubts. The title seemed accepted by the people as a challenge to their self-esteem. The music at these concerts was certainly not "popular," in the general acceptance of the term; but it was for the people to make it so by educating themselves gradually to the appreciation of it; and the result is that many of the compositions before unknown have now become "household words." At these concerts the best artists have been engaged during the past season; and, with

a little more attention bestowed upon the vocal department, we have no doubt that they will continue a permanent institution of the country.

The concerts of the Musical Society, although unquestionably amongst the best orchestral concerts in London, we do not particularly dwell upon, as the members of its own body are so numerous as almost to fill the room at each performance, without an appeal to the general public.

The pianoforte recitals of Mr. Charles Hallé and Herr Pauer have been amongst the legitimate attractions of the season; and have done much towards elevating the taste for solo compositions amongst those pioneers of progress on our household instrument—the young ladies. Pianoforte reform may spring from artists; but it must not be forgotten that it is chiefly by ladies that this reform is worked out in society. Let us hope, therefore, that those intrusted with this power will feel its importance, and not trifle with it as with a toy. Regarded as a showy and frivolous accomplishment, the eloquence of art is lost; and what is art without eloquence? The finger of the pianist, like the tongue of the orator, is merely the means to an end; it is the channel of communication between the speaker and the audience, and must be guided by the mind to the utterance of intelligible language. Let us hear no more of “a little chat whilst the music is going on.” To paraphrase Addison, the ladies’ motto should be—

“’Tis not in mortals to command silence,
But we’ll do more, we will deserve it.”

The admirable performances of the Sacred Harmonic Society must not be passed over in silence. Nothing can more fully prove the love of the people for the great sacred standard works, than the fact of a large and attentive audience at Exeter Hall following intently every note of the composition, and many with the aid of those cheap hand-books which the people’s publisher, Mr. Novello, has placed within the reach of all.

The many benefit concerts which have taken place during the season, may be briefly dismissed with a word of encouragement from all those who believe that good music cannot be heard too much.

In earnest sympathy with the healthy development of art, we cannot conscientiously express any sorrow that this year has seen no “monster gathering,” where the name of a great composer is used as a means of bringing together the latest fashions in dress. Let us not be misunderstood. We wish, in common with all artists, that great oratorios should be performed in such a manner that the due effect in every part should be distinctly brought out; but we confidently affirm that, to produce this effect, we want not only *power*, but *balance of power*; and, consequently, that space and number must be limited. The laws of acoustics must prove to all whose opinion is

founded on laws, that an entire mass of sound can only be conveyed perfectly to the ear when given forth by a certain number of performers, within a certain space. The only question then is, what number, and what space; but it is a manifest absurdity to say that the more you augment number and space, the greater will be the effect. Once admit this, and Salisbury Plain, roofed in, with all the voices and instruments that could be procured, would produce such a glorification of Handel as the world has never heard. The truth is, that a Musical Festival to *see*, and a Musical Festival to *hear*, are very different things. A criticism that went to the root of the late Handel Festival was, that it would have been very good, “but for the universal prevalence of the *mauve* colour.”

We should be justly accused of a want of patriotism, were we to close these remarks without an expression of earnest hope that the annual attempt made by Miss Louisa Pyne and Mr. Harrison, to found a home for English opera, may eventually produce a good result. In the expression of this hope, however, let it not be understood that we join in the too often repeated cry that English operatic talent is neglected. We hear constantly that no *place* is assigned to native opera, as if it were taken for granted that this *place* would be a sort of hot-house for the growth of British musical genius. Why, the fact is notorious, that English vocalists who are really competent, are eagerly sought for by managers; and that English operas of sterling value find a ready home for their reception. Where at this moment is the composer, the performer, or the vocalist of real merit, born on English soil, who is not the acknowledged favourite of the public? Where the foreigner, devoid of merit, who holds the same position, in defiance of the right of art? The truth is, that we love our countrymen much, but we love music more; and if we can give the public good operas, well sung, we shall have no impertinent questions asked about the land that produced either the composers or the vocalists.

With a passing commendation upon the artistic enthusiasm shown throughout the country in the establishment and steady progress of the numerous classes for the practice of classical part-music, the doings of which are periodically recorded in these columns, we must conclude our remarks on the past London musical season, one of the most brilliant, perhaps, on record.

That England’s musical future lies brightly before us, must be acknowledged by all who look lovingly and trustfully forward; and the growing desire for good music so rapidly spreading amongst the people, will no doubt have the effect of still further multiplying the means by which this desire can be gratified.